

the constitution of 1991 allows to have non-party members in the legislature and encourages open debate, the government continues to be controlled by the party.

Reforms in both Vietnam and Laos have not brought about an economic miracle and they are among the poorest countries in the world. Urbanisation is limited and the labour force is engaged in agriculture. For most people their economic conditions have not changed. Modern means of communication has not brought the world closer to them. Education is far below international standards. Laos does not have the human resources for development. Corruption is rampant and it inhibits foreign investment. In both countries, capitalism is looked upon with scepticism. As in the past, they continue to be aid-dependent. Perhaps globalisation may lead to democratisation. There is the likelihood of a shift in power to other groups.



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Is fresh water, the life-resource of this planet, a commodity that can be sold by giant corporations and bought by the needy? Water belongs to all of us; it is Nature's gift. It is our heritage and no one has the right to appropriate it for profit and it must remain in the public domain. Water is a human need and it is a human right and, like all other human rights, it is inalienable.

We are using fresh water indiscriminately, diverting it and selling it without regard to the consequences of our actions. We waste water ignoring the plight of the thirsty millions. We are, in fact, leading a water-depleting lifestyle. Water watchers warn us of the looming crisis that may threaten the survival of our planet.

Parched deserts, denuded forests, depleted rivers and seas, thirsty cities, destroyed wetlands and contaminated waterways. In fact, the entire ecosystem beckons us to act. We, the citizens of the world, have a responsibility and we cannot, in view of the grim situation, remain indifferent. We have to ensure that the abundance and quality of water remain undiminished and that we conserve this gift of nature for our posterity. What a Texan farmer said should resound in our ears: "Yes, you can have my water just like you can have my gun... when I pry it out of my hands."